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WILLIAM WEGMAN

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WILLIAM WEGMAN

Wake Forest University • Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art

North Carolina School of the Arts

Artist-In-Residence Program

1 October–14 November 1982

Sponsored by The Rockefeller Foundation

Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art
Winston-Salem, North Carolina

CATALOG COMPILED by Vicki Kopf
CATALOG DESIGN by Lee Hansley
PHOTOGRAPHY courtesy of Holly Solomon Gallery, New York
PRINTING by Wooten Printing Company, Inc.

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Library of Congress Catalog Number: 82-061978

The Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art
750 Marguerite Drive
Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27106

foreword

William Wegman's residency begins the fifth year of a major artist-in-residence program. This program, which brings artists of exceptional talent into the Winston-Salem community, is co-sponsored by three institutions; Wake Forest University, the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art and the North Carolina School of the Arts. Mr. Wegman's exhibition is unique in that it introduces the viewing public to art forms not previously represented in exhibitions by former artists-in-residence. Photography and video are the art forms used by William Wegman which are new to this exhibition format.

Our welcome to William Wegman on his visit to Winston-Salem and our thanks to the Rockefeller Foundation for its continued support of this program.

Vicki Cannon Kopf
Curator of Exhibitions
Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art

Naming the dog Man Ray was not necessarily meant, at first, as an **hommage.**

By Laurance Wieder

William Wegman's collaboration with Man Ray began in 1970 in Long Beach, California. Wegman had just moved there from Wisconsin to teach painting and drawing at the university, and he finally gave in to his wife's long-standing request that they get a dog. An advertisement—"Weimaraner puppies, $35"—appeared in the local paper. There were six females and one male in the litter; Wegman liked the male. Not completely convinced, he decided to flip a coin: heads, no dog; tails, that dog. It came up tails—seven times. Wegman brought the six-week-old puppy home.

Originally, Wegman wanted to name his weimaraner "Bauhaus," after the famous art school founded in Weimar, Germany, in 1919. But the puppy shivering in the corner of the studio didn't look like a Bauhaus. A Bauhaus, Wegman thought, should be black, white, and square, while this dog was gray shaded toward blue, and plump with baby fat. "Suddenly, late that night," he recalls, "it came to me like a light bulb: Man Ray."

Wegman works in three mediums: drawing, video, and (as he says) "photography, through the back door." His witty drawings propose conundrums, little grotesqueries, wry expressions sometimes embellished with written captions or comments. His video works, often reminiscent of vaudeville blackout numbers, play out a single idea in real time. In his altered photographs, where he draws or paints over black-and-white photographic prints, he paints what he cannot photograph. In these Wegman stands the artist Man Ray on his head, for the Surrealist claimed he only photographed what he could not paint. Naming the dog Man Ray was not necessarily meant, at first, as an **hommage.**

From the beginning, Wegman incorporated Man Ray into his work. He kept the dog with him all the time, at classes and in the studio. Man Ray, for his part, would not stay out of the artist's way. When Wegman tried tying the dog in a corner of the studio, Man Ray howled. Unleashed, he would blunder onto the set where Wegman was arranging things for the video camera. It became much easier for Wegman to work with the dog than around him. Their first videotape together featured Man Ray gnawing on a

microphone. Black-and-white portraits of the dog served as the basis for altered photographs. Wegman added pointed ears and whiskers to Ray's face to turn him into **Ray Cat**.

Man Ray became skilled as a model, having begun at an early age. He has an enormous need for love and attention, and is willing to put up with any number of transient irritations for the sake of love. Wegman recalls two periods, in 1977 and again in 1978, when he worked on his own, drawing, usually in the darkroom with the light on. "Ray sulked around the house. Now and then he would stalk into the darkroom, glare at me for a minute, then turn around and walk out."

Until the middle 1970s, Wegman photographed Man Ray in a variety of situations that displayed the dog's elegant shape from every angle. But as Man Ray aged, he grew heavy, and the artist began draping his subject to hide his thickening figure. "I hated to see him get older," Wegman explains. "That's a real problem in using one subject over so many years." A shy man, Wegman likes to stare at Ray with what he describes as a mixture of love and detachment. "To stare that way at a person would be too embarrassing." Dressing and disguising the dog, done first out of tact, became itself a fascination, and the artist "would have felt funny asking a person to put all those things on." A human model would not have the dog's stamina, patience, verve, or seriousness.

In the summer of 1978, Wegman was invited by the Polaroid Corporation to use its large-format camera in Cambridge, Massachusetts. One of a number of artists and photographers to receive such an invitation, Wegman "reluctantly" accepted, and soon began to make regular visits to the Polaroid studio. The camera, which works on the same principle as the familiar Polaroid camera invented by Dr. Edwin Land in 1947, makes 20-×-24-inch instant color prints on Polacolor professional film. It is operated by a technician, often assisted by a film handler and a lighting specialist. The studio supplies a set with a seamless-paper backdrop whose physical limitations eliminate distractions. When Wegman is on location, the technicians accompany the camera. Paced by the 85-second developing time of an image, Wegman can make changes in each pose until he gets a picture that satisfies him: about one in every twenty exposures. "The pictures come out like presents. And usually I thank everybody—the studio crew, Dr. Land, Ray—when the day is over."

These photographs evidence the same wit and concerns as the drawings and altered photographs, but as "through-the-back-door" photography, they are more immediately related to

Wegman's videotapes. In single photographs, Wegman and Man Ray manage to condense the extended conceits of the video performance into one elegantly composed and articulate image. Diptychs and triptychs tell spare stories. Wegman's fascination with the way things can be changed, explicit in the altered photographs, here takes an even more direct form. Costumes and props, often purchased in a local dime store the day before a shooting, afford one kind of metamorphosis: a bit of tinsel turns a weimaraner into an airedale in **Airedale. Ray Bat,** even more economical in its means, is simply a photograph of Man Ray lying on his back, with a lamp and flowers suspended upside down from the studio ceiling in a corner of the frame. Wegman analogizes the instant camera to video playback, which allows the artist to see immediately the work he has done. But unlike the grainy video image, the resulting glossy color prints have the presence and uniqueness of paintings: paint by camera, not by hand.

Poses for individual pictures are blocked out in sketches Wegman brings to the studio or are improvised on the set from what the dog suggests, what he can do, what Wegman can get him to do with coaxing and practice. Over the years, Ray and Wegman have developed a vocabulary, words and phrases that elicit particular responses. "Who's here?," for example, will cause Ray to look alertly toward the nearest door: Wegman used this question to make the right panel of **Garden**. Sometimes a combination of phrases is needed. In **Broken/ Hurt,** Wegman said to Ray, "Give me your paw. Bad dog." Then he snapped the shutter. Sometimes the expression is the dog's response to his predicament: **Baby Magic** is probably Ray's last word on child rearing. When Wegman asked artist Robert Kushner to design a fancy leash for Ray, Kushner got carried away and made seven outfits. The dog made repeated visits to Kushner's studio for fittings. The result was the **Suit/Suite.** The dog liked some of his costumes better than others, and perhaps it shows. He was particularly delighted with his pantaloons, cap, and garter in **French III;** he resented **Bag Lady**.

Although holding a pose is hard work, weimaraners are a working breed, and Ray acts a little lost if he hasn't been on camera for a while. Standing for the shot—holding on point—is, after all, in his blood. As for dressing up, Man Ray likes being covered or wrapped (as a puppy, he happily allowed Wegman to drape him in a cape, but ran away whenever he saw the leash). He doesn't mind being sprinkled, as he was with flour for **Dusted;** doesn't like but tolerates the noise of Disco Dazzle hair spray, used, for example, in **Silver Portrait**.

Photo Credit: D. James Dee

SPUN, 1981

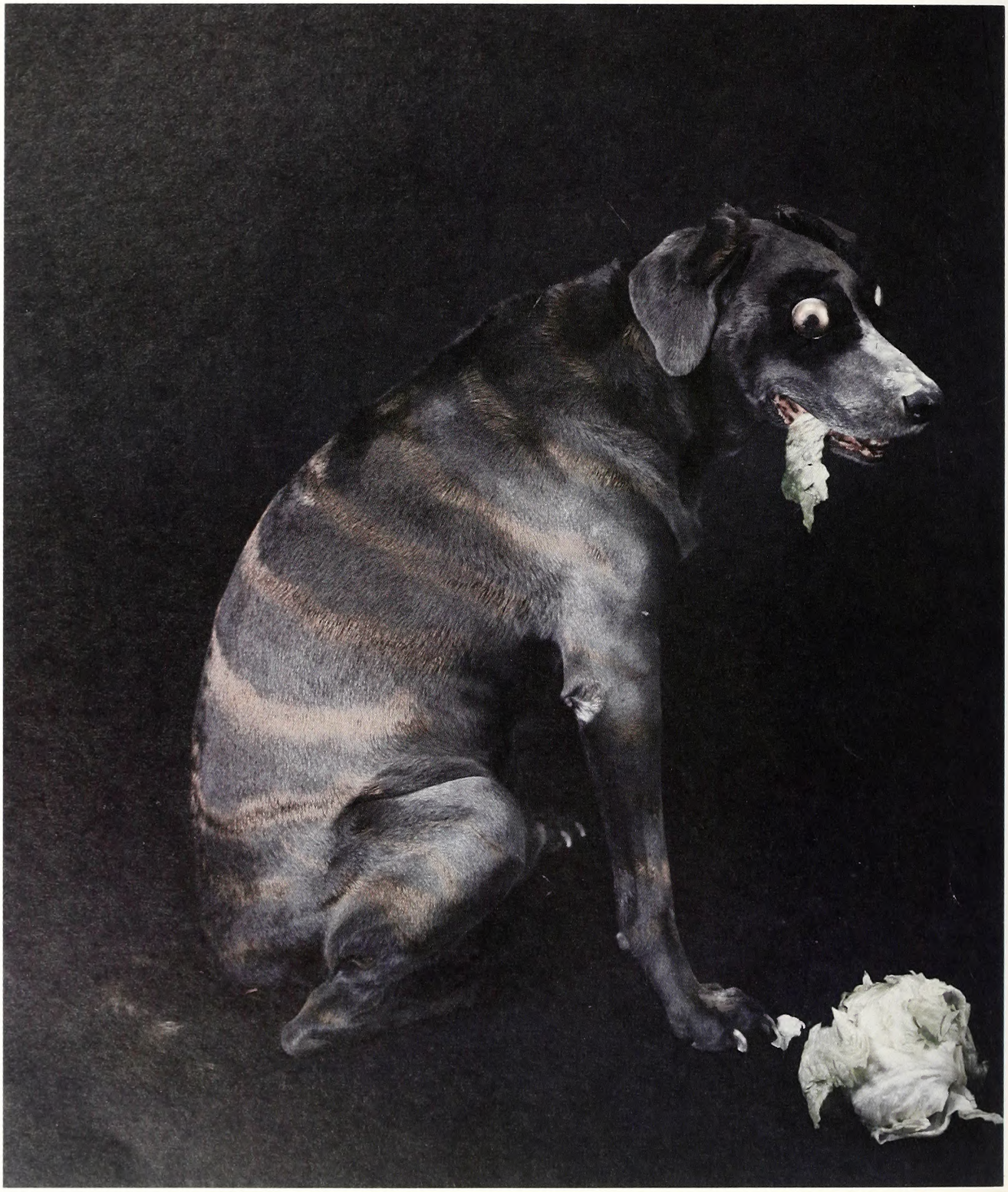

Photo Credit: D. James Dee

RACCOON EATING FOOD, 1982

Photo Credit: D. James Dee

TALL DOG, 1982

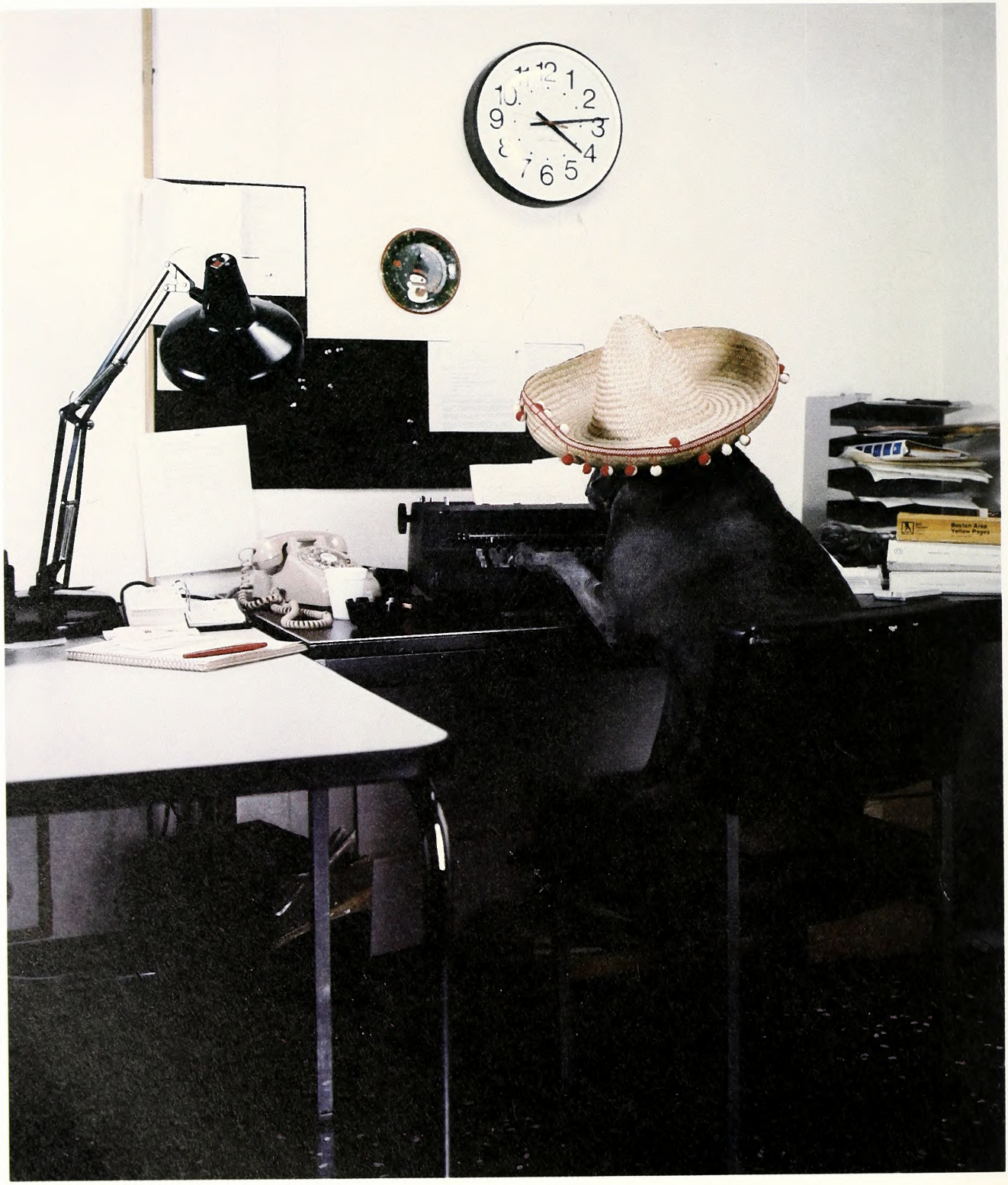

Photo Credit: D. James Dee

ALMOST 4:15, 1982

Does Man Ray understand his place in art? Or perhaps, more plausibly, does he understand that works of art exist, and that he has an image? He is careful about stepping on paper on the floor. He doesn't recognize himself in photographs, but he does wag his tail at his image in the mirror, and he cocks his head at the audio part of a video playback. Man Ray does not like replicas of animals, and once crossed the street to avoid a rocking horse.

Man Ray has appeared on the covers of three serious art magazines—**Avalanche, Artforum,** and **Camera Arts**—as well as on the cover of Sotheby's auction catalogue. Johnny Carson played Wegman's videotapes on the "Tonight" show, and the dog has appeared both on tape and in person on Public Television, "Saturday Night Live," "Tomorrow," and David Letterman's "Late Night" show. His status as an art world celebrity doesn't affect Ray, who like any other dog goes for walks, eats dog food, plays with his favorite rocks and teddy bears in the living room, and sleeps on the couch with the television on. Wegman, however, must contend with people on the street who recognize the dog rather than the master, and with the disproportionate attention paid to his Polaroid portraits of Man Ray, at the expense of his drawings and non-canine video projects. On the other hand, with Man Ray as constant companion, the artist always has a built-in distraction in conversations, a social exit. The dog's fame is the man's liberation.

Many of the dog's admirers harbor the same proprietary feelings and jealous concern other people have toward beloved, public, human figures. While the celebrity weimaraner may just be one more weird wrinkle in the fabric of American publicity, the sense that he comes to be known through the pictures, that uncanny relationships are revealed, places the model and his portraits among the objects of art.

To those unfamiliar with the photographs of Man Ray, the dog's most cunning disguise is to be himself. One winter afternoon at around five o'clock, William Wegman took Man Ray out for a walk in New York's financial district, where their loft is located. While Wegman stood around pretending Ray was not his dog, Ray sniffed the trash piles and curbs of Greenwich Street and conducted his business. A group of brokers headed home from Wall Street stopped to watch and discuss: What kind of dog was this? Was it a retriever, was it a weimaraner? They debated for a few moments until the light failed, concluded, "It's just a gray dog," and continued home.

Reprinted from MAN'S BEST FRIEND,
Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, New York

WILLIAM WEGMAN

born: 1942, Holyoke, Massachusetts

education: BFA in painting; Massachusetts College of Art, Boston
MFA in painting; University of Illinois, Urbana

solo exhibitions:

Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1982
McIntosh/Drysdale Gallery, Washington, D.C., 1982
Dart Gallery, Chicago, Illinois, 1982
Castelli-Goodman-Solomon, East Hampton, New York, 1981
Yarlow/Salzman Gallery, Toronto, Canada, 1981
The Flemington Museum, Fleming, Vermont, 1981
Clarence Kennedy Gallery, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1981
Magnuson Lee Gallery, Boston, Massachusetts, 1981
Vivianne Esders Gallery, Paris, France, 1981
"20 × 24" Polaroids," Holly Solomon Gallery, New York, 1980
Marianne Deson Gallery, Chicago, Illinois, 1980
"William Wegman: Selected Works 1970–1979," University of Colorado Art Galleries, Boulder; Aspen Center for Visual Arts, Aspen, Colorado, 1980
"William Wegman Retrospective," Fine Arts Galleries, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, 1979
Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Design, Los Angeles, California, 1979
Konrad Fischer Gallery, Dusseldorf, Germany, 1979
Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol, England, 1979
Holly Solomon Gallery, New York, 1979
Rosamund Felsen Gallery, Los Angeles, California, 1978
Bruno Soletti Gallery, Milan, Italy, 1977
Sonnabend Gallery, New York, 1977
The Kitchen, New York, 1976
Konrad Fischer Gallery, Dusseldorf, Germany, 1975
Galleria Alessandra Castelli, Milan, Italy, 1975
Mayor Gallery, London, England, 1975
Texas Gallery, Houston, Texas, 1974
112 Greene Street, New York, 1974
Galleria Toselli, Milan, Italy, 1974
Gallery D, Brussels, Belgium, 1974
Modern Art Agency, Naples, Italy, 1974
Francoise Lambert and Claire Copley Gallery, Los Angeles, California, 1973
L.A. County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California, 1973
Texas Gallery, Houston, Texas, 1973
Galerie Sonnabend, Paris, France, 1973
Courtney Sale Gallery, Dallas, Texas, 1972
Konrad Fischer Gallery, Dusseldorf, Germany, 1972
Situation, London, England, 1972
Galerie Ernst, Hanover, Germany, 1972
Sonnabend Gallery, New York, 1972
Pomona College Art Gallery, Pomona, California, 1971
Galerie Sonnabend, Paris, France, 1971

William Wegman is represented by the Holly Solomon Gallery in New York.

Photo Credit: Ana Busto

My first use of video was in 1969 when I was a visiting artist in painting and sculpture at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. I had been using photographs in my installation pieces and made two super 8 films. I borrowed a VTR and camera from the education department and set it up alone in my studio. By pointing the camera at an area and setting the monitor so I could view it from in front, I could turn it on, run to the area and do something, then play it back. Soon I started talking and manipulating objects for the monitor, record these actions and play it back. Usually I would get ideas from this point and redo it.

In 1970 I moved to Los Angeles, got my own equipment and a dog. He was fun to use in the taping and diverting from the inherent narcissism concerning "putting oneself on TV." I worked for another eight years in this manner, upgrading equipment as I could afford it.

In all cases, my most successful work has come when a kind of hypnosis, induced by monitoring my actions, leads the way.

William Wegman
12 August 1982
New York, NY

catalog of the exhibition

1. INSTEAD OF FALLING
   Graphite and Ink on Paper
   22.8 × 30.5 centimeters
2. FLY AGAINST ANT
   Graphite on Paper
   21.6 × 27.9 centimeters
3. SWEEPING UP COATHANGERS
   Graphite on Paper
   21.6 × 27.9 centimeters
4. BIG LITTLE FINGER
   Pencil on Paper
   27.9 × 21.6 centimeters
5. FAMILY ON ROOFTOP
   Graphite on Paper
   21.6 × 29.2 centimeters
6. UNTITLED
   Pencil and Ink on Paper
   21.8 × 27.3 centimeters
7. PLAN FOR HOUSE WITH ONE ROOM
   Pencil on Paper
   21.6 × 27.9 centimeters
8. LOTS OF ROOM AT THE EAGLE INN
   Pencil on Paper
   21.6 × 27.9 centimeters
9. HELP! HELP!
   Crayon and Pencil on Paper
   23.5 × 21.6 centimeters
10. THAT'S HER. I RECOGNIZE HER FACE.
    Crayon and Pencil on Paper
    21.6 × 27.9 centimeters
11. OVER 30 AND NEVER HAS TO SHAVE
    Graphite on Paper
    21 × 26.6 centimeters
12. IT'S NOT DIFFICULT
    Pencil and Magic Marker on Paper
    27.9 × 21.6 centimeters
13. RECYCLED FURNITURE
    Pencil on Paper
    21.6 × 27.9 centimeters
14. THE FARMER'S CLOTHES WHILE HE'S AWAY
    Pencil on Paper
    21.6 × 27.9 centimeters

15. 3 THINKERS; 3 DOERS
Pencil on Paper
21.6 × 27.9 centimeters

16. SKETCHES AND VARIATIONS
Pencil on Paper
21.6 × 27.9 centimeters

17. EASY STRAW
Pencil on Paper
21.6 × 27.9 centimeters

18. WOMAN WITH 2 HAIRS
Pencil on Paper
27.9 × 21.6 centimeters

19. COUPLE WATCHING THEIR CHILDREN PLAY
Pencil on Paper
21.6 × 27.9 centimeters

20. BARREL FISH
Pencil on Paper
21.6 × 27.9 centimeters

21. PARKING LOT TOO CLOSE TO PARK
Pencil on Paper
21.6 × 27.9 centimeters

22. UNTITLED
Ink on Paper
21.6 × 29.2 centimeters

23. UNTITLED
Black and White Photograph with Ink
50.8 × 36.8 centimeters

24. UNTITLED
Black and White Photograph with Paint and Ink
50.8 × 43.2 centimeters

25. HOFFMAN RESIDENCE
Black and White Photograph with Paper Collage
50.8 × 50.8 centimeters

26. SPRING MAPLES
Color Photograph
78.7 × 67.9 centimeters

*27. RACCOON EATING FOOD
Color Photograph
78.7 × 67.9 centimeters

28. TROPHY
Color Photograph
78.7 × 67.9 centimeters

*29. SPUN
Color Photograph
78.7 × 67.9 centimeters

*30. TALL DOG
Color Photograph
78.7 × 67.9 centimeters

*31. ALMOST 4:15
Color Photograph
78.7 × 67.9 centimeters

32. MAN RAY PORTFOLIO, A portfolio of ten photographs published in 1982
35.6 × 27.9 centimeters each
I MODELING SCHOOL, 1974
II DOG HOUSE, 1981
III THREE DOLLS, 1976
IV DOG CABIN, 1979
V MONUMENT, 1982
VI CONTEMPLATING THE BUST OF MAN RAY, 1978
VII DOUBLE PORTRAIT, 1973, 1981
VIII OF THE LAKE, 1976
IX RED DOG, 1982
X ON MRS. WEGMAN'S COUCH—AFTER COURBET, 1982

33. THE ACCIDENT TAPE, GREY HAIRS, MAN RAY MAN RAY
Video
Approximately 20 minutes in length

* Works reproduced in catalog

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